



New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

STAFFING AND OVERSIGHT REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE

Marygrace Billek, Chair
Mary Coogan, Vice-Chair

July 13, 2021
10:00 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.
Conference Call

In Attendance:

Marygrace Billek
Mary Coogan
Carmen Diaz-Petti
Amy Fischer
Corinne LeBaron
Amanda Melillo
Lori Morris
Linda Porcaro
Robyn Veasey
Angie Waters

Mercer County DHS
Advocates for Children of NJ
NJ Department of Children and Families
Monmouth Vicinage, Administrative Office of the Courts
Embrella
Office of Senator Joseph F. Vitale
Lifeties
Office of Youth Services - Somerset County
Office of the Public Defender
CASA Atlantic/Cape May

Guests

Kelly Monahan
Florence Racine
Dawn Marlow

Advocates for Children of NJ
NJ Department of Children and Families
NJ Department of Children and Families

Staff

Daniel Yale

NJ Department of Children and Families

"In compliance with Chapter 231 of the Public Laws of 1975, notice of this meeting was given by way of notice filed with the Secretary of State, the Trenton Times and the Newark Star Ledger and posted at the Department of State, 125 West State St., 1st Floor, Trenton, New Jersey."

**Please note the meeting is being recorded for the transcription of minutes. Please be sure to state your name prior to making comments, motions and seconding votes.*

Welcome and Introductions

A brief welcome was provided by Marygrace Billek and the meeting was called to order. Marygrace informed the Committee that Mary Coogan was chosen to be the new co-chair of the NJTF CAN. With this new appointment, Mary will be stepping down from her duties as co-chair of the SORS. Marygrace stated that the Committee would have to chose a replacement for Mary.



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Review February 9, 2021 Minutes

The February 9, 2021 meeting minutes were approved without edit.

Member Check-in Regarding COVID-19

DCF Race Equity Training Update

Florence Racine, Director, DCF Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Florence Racine explained that when Commissioner Beyer began in 2018, race equity was one of the areas that was included in the transformational goals and became part of the core approaches to our work. For the past few years, DCF has been digging deep to understand the disproportionality in our child welfare system, the role of structural and institutional racism, and how this has led to disparate outcomes for communities of color. Key data points:

- Number of children entering out of home placement between 2016 - 2019 decreased by 40%
- An additional 37% decrease in out of home placements from 2017 – 2020
- In 2016, there was an average of 4,500 children in out of home placement. In 2020, there are approximately 1,600.
- Between 2016-2019, the rate of child abuse and neglect in NJ was 2.6 per 1000. The national average is 8.9 per 1000 children.

Regarding disproportionality, based on NJ's population, black children are 3 times as likely to be reported as child victims than white children and almost 2 times as likely than Hispanic children. Black children are 4 times as likely to experience family separation compared to white children and approximately 2 times as likely as Hispanic children. While overall placement has been significantly reduced, the rate at which black children are separated from their families has not.

Due to this data, Commissioner Beyer created the DCF Race Equity Steering Committee to examine DCF practices, directives, and policies. DCF has also been assessing the consequential impacts of decision making on the children, youth, and families that are being served in terms of their physical and mental wellbeing, school performance, job opportunities, and overall life outcomes. Each of these areas plays into why the disproportionality exists. Since March 2021, all DCF employees are participating in race equity trainings. At this time, DCF is beginning to engage community partners, stakeholders, and parents and youth with lived experience to better understand the issues.



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The first step is to establish a clear, identified language so that all involved have an understanding of the problem. Phase one of the training is a four-part module training regarding implicit bias and was offered by the Kirwan Institute. The training aims to raise awareness of implicit bias and its aftereffects. In addition, Dr. Jessica Pryce provided a four module training series entitled, “Transforming Child Welfare Through Antiracism”. This was a mandatory training for all DCF staff and included the following modules:

- History, Policy, Data, Evolutionary Change, and Revolutionary Change
- Power and Privilege and Protective Factors in Child Welfare
- Mindset Shifting and Strengthening Families
- Antiracist Community Framework for Child and Family Well-being

The next phase is working with the Race Equity Steering Committee to build on the overview of looking at DCF’s policies, procedures, practices, legislation, etc. that guide the Department in making decisions. Once that has been completed, they will meet with each Division to create a framework with expectations of how to be more equitable. DCF will also be bringing in another consultant, Joyce James, to develop those plans. DCF is in the process of developing another set of training modules with Dr. Pryce for stakeholders and providers that will be released shortly. This will provide DCF the opportunity to engage families, providers, stakeholders, and communities to understand, historically, how we have gotten to this point and be able to map out the next stages to have better outcomes for children and families.

DCF Office of Resource Families Monmouth/Ocean pilot program

Dawn Marlow, Administrator, DCF Office of Resource Families

Darlene Fusco, Deputy Director, DCF Office of Resource Families/Licensing/Adoption Operations

Dawn Marlow explained that preserving kinship connections is one of DCF’s four transformational goals. Preserving kinship connections is not just looking at kin, but fictive kin as well where a child or family has a connection with a neighborhood friend, coach, teacher, etc. DCF’s objective for this goal is to increase the number of placements with kin or fictive kin to 60% for all children within the first 7 days of removal and 80% within 30 days of removal. This timeframe for meeting this goal was set for December 31, 2021. This goal is very important as research has shown that more children in out of home placement have positive outcomes when placed with kin or fictive kin. Placement with kin or fictive kin offers several benefits for children:



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- Protective factor against things such as re-entry into out of home care and post reunification maltreatment
- Better placement stability as well as being three times less likely to have 3 or more moves in care
- Better behavioral and mental health outcomes
- Children remain connected

Dawn explained that the Ocean/Monmouth area was chosen for this pilot program because they wanted an area that had high placement rates but were in the middle for kin placement rates. A staff survey was implemented in February 2020 to obtain feedback about kinship placement rates. The pilot strategies were as follows:

- Restructure of resource work to institute clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Specific tools to assist staff
 - Search technology
 - Updated, streamlined waiver process
 - DAsG trained in background checks to support offices
 - Kinship exception request – ensure that kinship option is best option
 - Preliminary home inspection within 10 days of placement

Dawn informed the Committee that the staff survey was created to obtain staff attitude and perspectives towards kinship care. The purpose was to diagnose where office's strength and areas of challenges were so that leaders in the area could focus strategies and interventions aimed at increasing kinship placement rates. The survey included 6 areas of focus:

- How staff perceived the benefits for the child in placing with kin
- Whether they were in a supportive environment to be able to make those decisions
- Perceptions around policies and processes
- Overall attitudes towards kinship caregivers and families
- Culture, race, and ethnicity in placing children with kin
- Attitudes around risk aversion – more risky with kin as opposed to non-kin.

In addition, all 46 local offices received a training titled, "Building Connections" in 2020. Included in this training was local kinship data, survey results, and the voice of youth ambassadors. The training focused on the value of placement with kin and fictive kin. DCF is also rolling out the Nurtured Heart approach and embedding that into training for resource parents.



STAFFING AND OVERSIGHT REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE

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Dawn showed the Committee the previous numbers related to kinship care in the Ocean/Monmouth area and then showed the current data from January 2021 to June 2021. The offices involved are currently exceeding the goal of 80% placement with kin with an 85% rate of placement with kin.

Dawn informed the Committee that DCF will be using some of the pilot strategies with offices across the state. DCF has expanded the kinship exception request in several areas. DCF is also developing a statewide plan to restructure the resource units in all of the remaining local offices. DCF has modified the pre-service training for kinship caregivers to narrow down the amount of information that was being provided virtually with a training plan to follow during the first year of licensure.

Updates from DCP&P Assistant Commissioner Carmen Diaz-Petti

Carmen informed the Committee that DCF began rolling out Solution Based Casework (SBC) training to staff on June 29, 2021. There has been very positive feedback regarding the training itself as well as how the staff are receiving the training. The focus is now being shifted to looking at how to ensure that there is fidelity to the model. DCF is in the process of discussing what the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process will be, who will track certain measures, and how they will be reviewing data. Commissioner Beyer will be holding a community forum that will include SBC trainers to discuss the SBC model. This will be important to the community to understand what SBC is, especially those providers that will be working closely with DCF in terms of assessment planning, as they will have a critical role in helping support the goals and objectives that families identify. The model developer created an online training that will be offered to different providers depending on what level training is necessary. DCF is anticipating that staff will be fully trained by the end of November 2021.

Carmen stated that DCF has also been changing forms including case plans. Many of the changes came about due to race equity work with the Race Equity Steering Committee. Staff will begin using these new forms in January 2022.

DCF is also working very closely with Rutgers to revise new worker training. The training currently consists of 6 modules and work is in progress to integrate SBC. The training will also be updated to include race equity, ACEs, family voice, kinship training, etc. The updates to new worker training should be complete by early 2022.

Committee Charter discussion & review/update 2021 Annual Workplan

Marygrace informed that Committee that, during their previous meeting, the Task Force discussed creating a charter for each subcommittee. Marygrace stated that there has been a shift in how things are



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being done at the state level since the SORS was created. Many of the things that are now legislatively mandated are the same issues that SORS was created to oversee. Marygrace felt that members need to discuss the direction of SORS going forward. Marygrace asked that the members, as a group, begin a conversation about what should be included in the charter and then work on the charter throughout the next few months. Carmen felt that the focus of SORS has really shifted from facilitating change to maintenance and monitoring maintenance. Mary Coogan agreed and felt that SORS should be reviewing current training, current case laws, etc. and whether they are continuing to produce good outcomes for children in NJ. Mary also felt that these items need to be reviewed to determine if they have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of DCP staff. The Committee also discussed that the impact of COVID-19 on staff has not been fully explored. Carmen informed the Committee that DCF sent a survey to staff regarding their attitude towards working remotely and their opinions on returning to work. The Committee discussed the possibility of looking at the survey results. Marygrace also discussed, in the place of having staff complete another survey for the SORS, holding key stakeholder interviews or focus groups about the effects of COVID-19 on staff. Marygrace asked that members enter their ideas on the blank charter form that was sent to the Committee prior to the meeting.

Announcements

Meeting Adjourned – Next meeting September 14, 2021.